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Sixty-second year

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New York

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Wolff	(United States of America)
<i>Members:</i>	Belgium	Mr. Verbeke
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Congo	Mr. Ikouebe
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Ghana	Mr. Christian
	Indonesia	Mr. Kleib
	Italy	Mr. Mantovani
	Panama	Mr. Suescum
	Peru	Mr. Voto-Bernales
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Bader
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Slovakia	Mr. Burian
	South Africa	Mr. Kumalo
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce

Agenda

Humanitarian situation in the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa

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The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Humanitarian situation in the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Holmes to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

The Security Council will now hear a briefing by Mr. John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Holmes: I thank you very much, Sir, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on my mission to Somalia and Uganda from 11 to 16 May.

I visited Somalia to assess at first hand the humanitarian situation and to discuss with the authorities the key issues of access, protection of civilians and security of humanitarian operations. The recent massive displacement has further compounded one of the most difficult humanitarian situations in the world, in a country affected not only by long-running internal conflict, but also by chronic food insecurity, alternating droughts and floods, and endemic disease.

I visited Uganda to understand better and discuss with the Government the challenges and opportunities we face in northern Uganda in helping displaced people in camps, those moving back towards their homes and others already returning home, against the background of some optimism about the Juba peace talks.

My mission to Somalia was the first United Nations visit by someone at my level since the early 1990s. I had intended to spend two days there — first in Mogadishu, to discuss with the Transitional Federal Government ways to improve the humanitarian response, to see the level of destruction caused by recent fighting, to visit settlements of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and to meet some of the war-wounded; and secondly, to visit newly displaced and rural communities in Jowhar for a first-hand assessment of their conditions.

Unfortunately, a roadside bomb exploded a few minutes after my arrival in the Somali capital, killing three Transitional Federal Government Security officials. Two other roadside devices exploded shortly afterwards, while the Africa Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) defused a fourth. All those bombs were on or near the routes we had planned to take.

I do not think that I — or the United Nations or the wider humanitarian community — was the prime target of those attacks. Rather, I suspect that they were aimed at discrediting any view that the conflict was effectively over. In any case, the bombs reduced my planned movements around Mogadishu and the resulting security and transport problems meant that I was unable to go on to Jowhar.

Let me take this early opportunity to thank again the Ugandan contingent of AMISOM for its professional help in accompanying my visit. It was encouraging that its presence in the streets seemed to be welcomed by the people of Mogadishu. That makes last week's loss of four Ugandan peacekeepers following a further roadside bomb all the more tragic. I repeat my condolences to the Ugandan Government and armed forces and the families of the victims.

As I told the Security Council on 24 April, we believe that the intense and deadly burst of fighting in Mogadishu in late April not only resulted in hundreds of deaths and injuries, many of them innocent civilians caught in the crossfire, but also caused up to 400,000 inhabitants to flee the city. While some return is taking place, mainly from the outskirts of Mogadishu and mainly of people trying to re-establish their livelihoods because they have no assets and are living without support, the vast majority of those who fled have not yet come back to the city.

Factors inhibiting larger-scale return include difficulties of movement, continued fear of violence,

warnings by the Transitional Federal Government to long-standing IDPs in Mogadishu not to return to so-called public buildings, and the fact that many people from areas badly damaged by the fighting now have no homes to return to. Many of those concerned continue to live in deplorable conditions in the open countryside, sheltered only by trees and with minimal or no access to food, basic sanitation, clean water, shelter and medical care. One particular concern is the plight of pregnant women having to deliver without medical help. Meanwhile, over 30,000 cases of acute watery diarrhoea and associated cholera have now been recorded in southern Somalia, including almost 1,000 related deaths.

In late April, harassment and intimidation of humanitarian staff, closure of strategic airstrips and administrative directives by the Transitional Federal Government were greatly obstructing humanitarian efforts. Over the last few weeks, progress has been made in delivering assistance, thanks in part to increased cooperation with the authorities.

Around 290,000 displaced people have so far been reached with non-food items, while the health and sanitation response has involved support for hospitals, provision of medicines and chlorination activities. The World Food Programme (WFP) and CARE have together distributed food supplies to around 180,000 people. However, the plain fact is that so far, assistance has not remotely matched the needs. There are pockets of South-Central Somalia which have remained inaccessible and obstacles to humanitarian access continue.

Unfortunately, piracy is also hindering the World Food Programme's ability to move food by sea, while private contractors hired by humanitarian agencies to deliver aid are having problems with land convoys. There are, for example, checks every 10 kilometres in some areas, with so-called taxes of up to \$100 per checkpoint.

During my visit to Mogadishu, I discussed with President Yusuf Ahmed and Prime Minister Gedhi the urgent need to increase relief efforts, for example by establishing better mechanisms for liaison and resolution of problems between authorities and the humanitarian community. I also urged the Government to issue instructions to control actions of armed groups at checkpoints; to ensure that visa, permits and customs problems were minimized; and to make clear publicly

that all possible assistance should be given to agencies and non-governmental organizations engaged in providing humanitarian relief.

The President and Prime Minister assured me that they were fully committed to helping. However, our discussion was complicated by disagreement on the severity of the crisis. They suggested that only 30,000 to 40,000 people had been displaced by the fighting in Mogadishu and that half of those had already returned to the capital. They also strongly underlined the need for relief organizations to cooperate more with the authorities and to relocate rapidly from Nairobi to Somalia.

In turn, I raised the fate of the approximately 250,000 long-standing urban displaced in Mogadishu, a significant number of whom are from the Hawiye clan and many of whom have fled the city. IDP sites which were situated in areas of high-intensity conflict have been abandoned, while those IDPs who were living in public buildings are unable to return, given the Government's stated intention to repossess those buildings. The Government has not yet suggested an alternative sustainable solution other than to suggest a return to the areas of origin. While I understand the Government's need to reinstate public institutions, it is imperative that alternative solutions be identified for that highly vulnerable segment of the population.

After the meeting with the Transitional Federal Government, I was able to visit briefly a site where some of the IDPs have lived for up to 17 years. The building, by pure chance the former British embassy in Mogadishu, currently hosts over 150 families, the majority of them pastoralists who lost their assets in the early 1990s and moved to the capital in search of work. As I walked through the narrow spaces between still incredibly makeshift huts built with scraps of material and sticks, I tried to imagine the daily life of the children following me and the future in store for them. Frankly, not enough has been done to provide those people with the basic conditions of human dignity.

I told the Council on 24 April that I had been particularly concerned by reports of severe breaches of international humanitarian law during the recent fighting, with indiscriminate use of massive force in civilian areas, apparently by all sides. There have also been many reports of major human rights violations, including abductions and unlawful killings, and there

are concerns over the apparently arbitrary detention, deportation and disappearance of individuals. When I raised those concerns, President Yusuf rejected any allegations of Transitional Federal Government involvement. He nevertheless accepted my proposal of a visit to Somalia by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to look into those claims. I hope that such a visit can take place soon.

During my short stay in Mogadishu, I was also able to meet with representatives from civil society, including elders and women's groups. They conveyed to me their concerns about the intimidation of civil society and the local media. Several also expressed their conviction that the United Nations and the international community in general had abandoned Somalia and were not interested in the fate of the Somali people. I assured them that this was not true and that my own presence in Mogadishu was a symbol of the deep concern of the United Nations, political as well as humanitarian. We all have a responsibility to ensure that this is indeed the case, and not to turn our backs on Somalis in this latest hour of desperate need.

As I speak, United Nations and non-United Nations relief organizations are doing all they can to step up further humanitarian relief efforts. Besides providing emergency food supplies, UNICEF is targeting 180,000 people in south central Somalia for shelter and other non-food items. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is aiming to provide emergency shelter, non-food items and support to basic services for 90,000 people. I have already made clear that \$10 million is available from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) for those and other projects. But I urge other donors to increase their response also, including through support for NGOs working hard to increase their presence and activities in Somalia, some of them for the first time.

The biggest single contribution to humanitarian relief efforts would be the establishment of genuine stability, which would enable people to return home freely and to begin to re-establish their lives. That cannot come from a military solution but from inclusive political dialogue and reconciliation across the main political and other groups, which the international community has been demanding. These efforts need to be redoubled if there is to be any hope of a lasting peace, with Ethiopian forces withdrawn

and the African Union force fully deployed. Otherwise, I fear, on the basis of what I saw and heard during my visit, that the chances of more long years of conflict, degradation and poverty are high. Meanwhile, it is of the utmost importance that the impartiality and independence of the humanitarian response be preserved and that the Transitional Federal Government and other Somali actors be fully supportive of it.

I would like to conclude by expressing my appreciation for the efforts of United Nations and other humanitarian national staff in Somalia who, despite extremely difficult and dangerous conditions, continue to run vital operations. Many from Mogadishu have become IDPs themselves but, despite having to care for their displaced families, still travel for hours every day into the capital to carry on their work. It is mainly thanks to them that we are able to maintain at least some assistance to the Somalis who are in such desperate need.

Let me now turn to northern Uganda, and a more encouraging picture. I have returned from my visit there with the belief that the Ugandan Government and the international community now have the opportunity, through supporting the political process in Juba and continuing humanitarian aid and in the transition from relief to recovery, to resolve one of Africa's major humanitarian emergencies — but that a major international effort is still required on all those fronts.

The situation in the conflict-affected districts of northern Uganda is improving, as security has increased with the major decline in attacks by Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and as the efforts of the Ugandan Government and the international humanitarian community to help the displaced have borne some fruit. There is a degree of optimism in the air. Night commuting to avoid abduction by the LRA — once the most tragic face of northern Uganda, affecting over 20,000 children — has largely ceased. Nevertheless, there is a long distance still to travel and serious obstacles in the way. Camps still hold 1.6 million displaced people, though that number is significantly down from its height of 2 million three years ago.

A recent UNHCR report shows that a number of displaced people are tentatively moving out of the camps towards their places of origin. Some have already moved back home permanently. But that

movement is not yet massive or irreversible. In the Acholi subregion, nearly three quarters of the 1.1 million IDPs remain in their original camps. One quarter are now in new settlement sites nearer their homes, often commuting daily to their villages of origin. But so far only one per cent, or just over 7,000, have permanently returned to their places of origin. In the Lango subregion, further from the sensitive border area, the situation is more encouraging still. Only one quarter of the 466,000 displaced people remain in camps, while the remainder — over 350,000 — have already returned home. It is important that the process of return continues to depend on free and informed choices by the people themselves.

In Kitgum district in the Acholi subregion, I visited the new Labworomor settlement site for those who have left a large neighbouring camp and are moving towards their homes. The residents told me clearly that they would not feel safe enough to return to their homes for good until a final peace deal with the Lord's Resistance Army was reached, ending the 20-year conflict. Their desire for peace was strong and palpable. They were clearly following every twist and turn in the Juba talks with a mixture of anticipation and anguish. They also said that a full return would not be possible until there were basic services such as water, health care and education in their original home areas. I was given similar messages in the nearby Namokora IDP camp, home to some 17,000 displaced people, where I spent the night after discussing the situation with camp elders around the traditional evening fire. They brought home to me their fears for their culture and their way of life if the conflict is not resolved soon so that they can finally return to their normal lives.

The situation — with most people still in camps, some in half-way house satellite areas and others already beginning to return home — presents us with a triple challenge, which I was able to discuss with President Museveni and members of his Government.

First, we need to go on providing vital humanitarian assistance to the 1.6 million people still in camps. Secondly, people who have either moved to new settlement sites or are commuting to their places of origin from their existing camp continue to need basic food and household items, but they also require access to services such as water and sanitation, health services and education in their new areas. Thirdly, those who have returned to their homes require a basic support package for the early stages, but more

importantly, they need a large amount of development and reconstruction help to re-start their normal agricultural livelihoods, with re-established infrastructure and social provisions. Those three phases will coexist, often in close proximity, creating a complex situation which demands a flexible and highly coordinated approach. We must also take into account important and difficult issues such as land rights; the continued demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants; the fate of extremely vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, disabled and orphans, who are unable easily to return home; and the disposal of landmines and unexploded ordnance left over from the conflict.

If the current positive trends continue, we can all see clearly the coming challenges and opportunities. We have to effect a seamless transition from relief to development, not something the international community has always been distinguished for. The Government of Uganda, with the support of the World Bank and the international aid community, is working up a peace, recovery and development plan. This strategy, which should be implemented progressively in parallel with the continuing humanitarian relief efforts, will need the full commitment of everyone if it is to succeed. We cannot afford to fail, and we will have no good excuses if we do.

But none of this will be possible without continued generous levels of funding. In 2006, the Consolidated Appeal for Uganda was 90 per cent funded. Worryingly, this year's Appeal is projected to be funded at only 50 per cent of its \$303 million target. The World Food Programme has already had to reduce its ration to IDPs from 60 per cent to 40 per cent of full requirements. I therefore urge all concerned not to relax their efforts and their provision of resources just at the moment when they are most needed.

The success of the peace process is the immediate key to this opportunity. The Juba talks, with the mediation of the Government of Southern Sudan and the facilitation of President Chissano, are beginning to produce some results. At the same time, we are all aware that the process is fragile and that the issue of the International Criminal Court warrants will have to be properly addressed in a way that satisfies the requirements of both peace and justice. No one is following this with more intense concentration than the displaced of northern Uganda, who want above all to see reconciliation and lasting peace. That was, for

example, the clear message from a group of former child abductees I met, despite their appalling experiences.

For our part, the United Nations will continue to support the Government of Southern Sudan through the Juba Initiative Project, helping in practical and political ways the Peace Secretariat and the Cessation of Hostilities Monitoring Team. I believe that these talks also deserve full support from the wider international community and from key regional Governments. The stakes are high, both for northern Uganda and for Southern Sudan.

I also raised with President Museveni and the Government the situation in Karamoja, in the north-east of Uganda. The Government is engaged there in a process of removal of the many illegally held weapons in that long-troubled region. This is, of itself, necessary and legitimate. For example, many displaced people in Acholi raised with me their rising fears of Karamojong cattle rustlers, responsible for several recent killings and violent incidents. However, there have also been many concerns about excessive use of force by the Government and other human rights violations, for example as detailed in the latest report from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. I urged the Government to take these concerns seriously and to step up their development efforts in parallel with the disarmament process.

I have described today two very different situations, but both deserve close attention and help from the international community in general and from the Security Council in particular. In Somalia, the immediate humanitarian needs are huge and largely unmet so far. Little real improvement can be expected unless there is a satisfactory and fully inclusive internal political settlement. Otherwise, I fear the worst.

In Uganda, on the other hand, the United Nations and the international community, working closely with the Government of Uganda, have the chance to bring to a peaceful end one of the most intractable conflicts in Africa and to make a real success of the return to their homes of the displaced people of northern Uganda. These people are poised between hope and fear: hope that the day of their definitive return home may be close, and fear that if the peace talks break down, renewed violence could again wrest this prize from their grasp. I urge all concerned to do what they can to

ensure that this perhaps unique opportunity is not missed.

The President: I thank Mr. Holmes for his briefing.

Mr. Burian (Slovakia): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Holmes for his briefing on the humanitarian situation in Somalia and northern Uganda. We commend his efforts and courage in undertaking the mission to Somalia to assess the humanitarian situation on the ground. We share his concerns about the severity and magnitude of the humanitarian crisis in Somalia. We believe that the international community must strengthen its efforts to help the Transitional Federal Institutions stabilize the situation on the ground and to provide humanitarian relief to hundreds of thousands of people in dire need of assistance and protection.

In this regard, we call on all Somali parties to stop the bloodshed and engage in a genuine political dialogue. We call on the Transitional Federal Institutions to reach out to all parties and groups of Somali society to start an inclusive national reconciliation process that will lead to a lasting and sustainable solution to the conflict in Somalia.

We strongly condemn the recent attacks and acts of piracy threatening relief deliveries to the country and the ability to feed one million Somalis. We believe that all necessary steps and actions should be undertaken by the international community to stop these attacks, protect humanitarian aid ships and establish safe corridors to allow full and unhindered humanitarian access. We must make sure that the perpetrators of these criminal activities are brought to justice.

At the same time, we agree with Mr. Holmes that the Transitional Federal Government must assume its responsibility to look after civilians and provide a more enabling operating environment for aid workers. We therefore urge the authorities in Somalia to extend their full cooperation to humanitarian agencies and to facilitate the free movement of relief workers into and throughout the country.

We also share the concerns of Mr. Holmes about grave violations of international humanitarian law, including the violation of rights of women and children in Somalia, as reported by the Secretary-General in his latest report on children in armed conflict in Somalia

(S/2007/259). The report highlights the fact that the children continue to be a highly vulnerable group in Somalia. We note several especially disturbing developments in this regard, such as an increase in the targeted recruitment of children, the abduction of children, and sexual violence against women and girls within the context of internally displaced persons. We fully support the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General.

We call on all international partners to intensify their mediating and peacemaking efforts in Somalia to ensure the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1744 (2007). We agree with Mr. Holmes that those efforts need to be redoubled if there is to be any hope for lasting peace.

We pay tribute to the four Ugandan peacekeepers who made the ultimate sacrifice. In that respect, we wish to underline the urgent need for full deployment of the African Union Mission in Somalia to that country. In our view, this is crucial for stabilizing the situation on the ground and for creating conditions in which the peace process can unfold. The international community must provide its full assistance and support to the African Union mission to enable it to carry out its mandate.

We welcome the fact that Mr. Holmes also had the chance to visit Uganda and meet with political representatives, as well as with local authorities and aid workers. Slovakia is pleased to note the improved security situation in the region and the gradual return of numbers of internally displaced persons closer to their homes. However, there is still concern about the humanitarian crisis that is affecting 1.6 million people in northern Uganda. We are encouraged by the recent resumption of the peace talks between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army in Juba, and we would like to emphasize the need to use the current window of opportunity to bring this long-lasting conflict to a final and comprehensive resolution without compromising principles of international justice.

We fully share the view of Mr. Holmes that the international community should continue to support the recovery process and assist people in returning to their homes. We hope that the current efforts aimed at improving assistance and implementing the recovery plans will continue.

With respect to children affected by the armed conflict in Uganda, we are concerned about the findings in the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Uganda (S/2007/260), especially that a number of children are still being held within the ranks of the Lord's Resistance Army. Despite the encouraging cooperation of the Ugandan authorities with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, in our view the investigation carried out by UNICEF and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees of crimes perpetrated by members of the Uganda People's Defence Force is still unsatisfactory. We fully support the recommendations contained in the report and, in particular, the Secretary-General's call for immediate steps to be taken to end child recruitment and the use of child soldiers and to release children.

Finally, we would like to pay tribute to all humanitarian organizations working in northern Uganda and in Somalia for their relentless efforts to ease the humanitarian suffering of thousands of people in both Somalia and Uganda.

Mr. Al-Bader (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank Mr. John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for his presence here today and for his comprehensive briefing to the Council this morning.

We agree with the Under-Secretary-General that the situation in both Uganda and Somalia — the subject of our debate today — is deteriorating and needs to be urgently addressed. We note that the humanitarian situation in the two regions under discussion is among the worst in the world and that their peoples have been suffering greatly for more than a decade.

We believe that the root causes of the situation are twofold: the deteriorating economic situation, and the continuing strife and political upheaval. The two aspects are interlinked to some extent, and we therefore believe that the Security Council must take the humanitarian situation into consideration when analysing issues relating to those two regions.

In addition to this morning's briefing to the Security Council, we received reports earlier this month from the Secretary-General on the human rights situation in Somalia and in Uganda, specifically

relating to the human rights situation of children in both countries. There are many indications that there has been a regrettable deterioration in the human rights and humanitarian situation of children in those two countries.

We welcome the agreement between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army concerning humanitarian assistance and helping internally displaced persons to return to their homes. We join other members of the Security Council in underlining the importance of cooperation among United Nations bodies in dealing with the humanitarian situation of civilians, particularly the most vulnerable among them. We also call on all parties to the conflicts in those regions to commit themselves to protecting civilians and to not taking any measures that would endanger civilians or prevent humanitarian assistance from reaching them. We also call for an end to all acts that fall beyond the scope of international legitimacy. We look forward to receiving further briefings in the future on serious humanitarian situations pertaining to conflict situations that are on the agenda of the Security Council.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I would like to add our words of thanks to the Under-Secretary-General for his briefing. These humanitarian updates are very welcome, and they serve as an important reminder to the Council of the human cost of conflict.

The Under-Secretary-General's account today shone a very sobering and much-needed spotlight on two of the worst humanitarian crises that we face today — one a new humanitarian emergency, and the other a crisis that we must not forget, even as the prospects begin to look potentially less bleak. The United Kingdom has made both Somalia and Uganda priorities in the allocation of our humanitarian assistance, and we invite others to do the same.

I would like to make a few brief remarks on Somalia and Uganda. First, with regard to Somalia, the United Kingdom deeply regrets the deaths of Ugandan peacekeepers in Somalia on 16 May. We remain committed to providing financial and logistical support to the African Union Mission in Somalia as it tries to help to bring peace and stability back to a country that has known little but conflict for so long. The Under-Secretary-General's briefing set out in stark terms the desperate situation faced by the displaced in south and central Somalia, many of whom are vulnerable to

malnutrition and to diseases such as cholera. This should only strengthen the determination of Security Council members and partners to play our part. In particular, we believe that we must make clear to those in the region their responsibility for ending the hostilities, initiating, as John Holmes emphasized, a genuinely inclusive political process and facilitating the free movement of aid and humanitarian workers into, out of and throughout Somalia.

The United Kingdom is conveying these messages — which were set out clearly in the Security Council's presidential statement of 30 April (S/PRST/2007/13) — to the relevant parties at the highest level, and we again invite Security Council partners to join us in doing so.

The United Kingdom welcomes the agreement given by President Yusuf to the Under-Secretary-General on a visit by a team from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to investigate accusations of human rights violations.

Let me turn now to northern Uganda. The United Kingdom welcomes the Under-Secretary-General's early visit to an area where conflict has caused massive humanitarian suffering for nearly two decades. The security situation in northern Uganda has improved significantly over the past few months, but well over 1 million people still live in very difficult conditions in camps for internally displaced persons, and we should not forget that. We welcome the Under-Secretary-General's discussions with the Government of Uganda on its obligations to communities in the north.

The prospect of securing a lasting peace agreement is self-evidently a desperately important one for the population of northern Uganda, and one that we should do all we can to help deliver. In this regard, we commend the efforts of the Special Envoy, President Chissano, which played a pivotal role in securing a resumption of the Juba peace talks on 26 April. It is also encouraging that both sides agreed to an extension of the cessation of hostilities agreement. The international community must maintain political and logistical support for the Juba talks and must urge both sides to stay focused on delivering a comprehensive peace deal. We believe that the Council must remain engaged and supportive, given the scale of the humanitarian and security implications across the region. As the Under-Secretary-General said, the

challenge ahead is to move from conflict and emergency relief to peace and development.

Mr. Kleib (Indonesia): I would like first of all to join others in welcoming Under-Secretary-General Holmes once again to the Security Council and in thanking him for his briefing on his visit to Somalia and Uganda.

My delegation shares the view that the humanitarian situation in the two regions under discussion remains deeply troubling. The humanitarian needs are particularly great in Somalia, owing to the scale of the recent crisis there. We are nonetheless encouraged by the gradual improvement in the Great Lakes region as peace emerges, albeit slowly, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in northern Uganda.

In Somalia, the deteriorating humanitarian situation is a matter of grave concern. We deeply regret Mogadishu's return to conflict and instability, especially given that it enjoyed a measure of peace and stability last year. Many of us have already referred to the current situation as the worst humanitarian crisis since the early 1990s. Indeed, an estimated 300,000 people have fled Mogadishu in recent months due to the heavy fighting; more than a thousand have perished; and an additional 1.8 million people continue to be in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. All sides in Somalia must respect international humanitarian law, protect civilians and allow humanitarian access to those in need.

The deteriorating humanitarian situation is a direct consequence of the continued failure by Somali parties to find a political solution to their differences. It is therefore imperative that an all-inclusive national reconciliation process commence urgently, as called for in Security Council resolution 1744 (2007).

In the final analysis, the Somali problem is for the Somalis to resolve; the international community can only encourage and help the process to take place. In that regard, we support the Secretary-General's efforts to facilitate and assist in the reconciliation process. We commend the African Union for its efforts to find an early solution to the longstanding conflict, including through the deployment of the African Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). We condemn the recent killing of AMISOM personnel. We look forward to the full deployment of AMISOM and urge the

international community to strengthen its assistance to AMISOM in the implementation of its mandate.

Turning to the Great Lakes region, my delegation also regrets that the humanitarian situation there remains grave. We are, however, hopeful that the current political resolution of some conflicts, such as those in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in northern Uganda, will bring relief and, indeed, a gradual improvement in the humanitarian situation.

With regard to Uganda, we support the "triple effort" approach being taken by the humanitarian community involving the provision of aid to those still in camps; assistance to those in the process of returning; and early recovery aid for those who have already returned to their homes. We share the view that greater efforts could be made to assist the more than one million displaced persons who are still living in the camps. We believe that progress on the political and diplomatic front, in particular with respect to the Juba peace talks, would lead to an improvement in the humanitarian situation, and we must therefore ensure the continuation and progress of the peace process.

My delegation stresses that, as the international community continues with its humanitarian assistance efforts as well as its support for the peace process, it is important also to start looking at how development assistance could also be provided in order to sustain the gains that are being made.

My delegation deems it essential that, in order to ensure the success of humanitarian efforts, such noble endeavours should always observe international principles of humanitarian assistance, which include respect for the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality; full respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States and for the primary role of the affected State in the initiation, organization, coordination and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory; and, lastly, the observance of international and national laws as the basis for cooperation to address situations and to strengthen the emergency response capacity of affected countries.

Finally, in areas where humanitarian organizations operate, such as the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa, coordination with the local authorities is imperative if the operation is to enjoy local ownership and be successful and sustainable. While the short-term needs of refugees and internally

displaced persons (IDPs) must be urgently addressed, it is also essential to ensure that the long-term social, economic and political impact on the local community remains beneficial.

Mr. De La Sablière (France) (*spoke in French*): I, too, should like at the outset to thank the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Holmes, for his briefing and to commend him for his courage. His visit to Somalia last week was the first such visit by a United Nations Headquarters official at that level in nearly 15 years. That in itself sends a message that underlines the commitment of the United Nations. In that context, we welcome the fact that the Transitional Federal Government has agreed to a visit by Ms. Louise Arbour, High Commissioner for Human Rights. We hope that that visit will take place very shortly.

The Under-Secretary-General had to cut short his visit for security reasons, which confirms our concerns. During the consultations we held on Somalia at the end of April, my delegation had already expressed the importance it attaches to the issue of the security of humanitarian operations. The Transitional Federal Government must stop questioning the scale of the humanitarian crisis resulting from three months of fighting. Several sources indicate that from 350,000 to 400,000 people — a considerable number — have fled Mogadishu since February. It is not acceptable that only one third have access to humanitarian assistance. Nor is it acceptable that a majority of people, from a certain ethnic group, are being prevented from returning to their homes.

We call on the Transitional Federal Government, the Ethiopian forces and the armed groups to respect international humanitarian law. They must allow the transit of World Food Programme and High Commissioner for Refugees convoys; they must facilitate the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross; and they must help rather than hinder those major non-governmental organizations that are prepared to work in Somalia, such as Doctors without Borders. An end must be put to the taxes imposed at checkpoints and to the difficulties faced in the obtaining of visas.

We are very concerned at the general lack of access by humanitarian workers to the civilian population, and we would like to know what could be done to allow for greater access to the victims. We

would like to hear Mr. Holmes's comments on the issue.

However, we welcome the commitments made by the Transitional Federal Government during Mr. Holmes's visit. They must be translated into reality. Unequivocal instructions must be given to both the armed forces and the militias. We also urge the Somali authorities finally to commit themselves to a genuinely inclusive political solution. That is the only way to respond in the long term to the crisis in Somalia and, in the short term, to the current humanitarian crisis.

Before concluding on the issue of Somalia, I should like to pay tribute to the African Mission in Somalia, which is paying a high price in that country.

The situation in northern Uganda is still of concern, even though some progress has been achieved with regard to displaced persons since the signing of the ceasefire agreement. Millions of people in that country have been displaced, and we hope that the population, traumatized by two decades of violence, will continue to return. The information provided by Mr. Holmes is encouraging, even though the trend that has been observed requires further confirmation. It is likely that these persons will not return to their homes in the absence of a lasting peace. Thus, the extension until 30 June of the ceasefire agreement between the Ugandan Government and the Lord's Resistance Army must be fully taken advantage of. We reaffirm our support for President Chissano and the Juba talks.

As we wait for peace, we take note of the threefold effort that Mr. Holmes requests us to make, with regard to those in the camps, those choosing to return and those who, once they have returned home, will still need the international community. We understand that humanitarian aid cannot be reduced at this stage; essential needs must still be met. We understand that humanitarian aid cannot be reduced until development assistance takes over, particularly in the areas of education and health.

We are pleased to note that civilian administration — particularly the police and the justice system — is increasingly present in northern Uganda. We congratulate the Government of Uganda, and we encourage this trend.

Finally, I should like to highlight two concerns. The first is the disarmament operations in the

Karamoja region, which are provoking violence. We call upon the Ugandan authorities to avoid any use of force. Secondly, we request the Ugandan authorities to ensure that tangible progress is made within the local defence units, which are under the authority of the Uganda People's Defence Forces, so that the rights of children are respected and the use of child soldiers is strictly prohibited.

Mr. Christian (Ghana): I too wish to thank Mr. John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for his briefing.

Mr. Holmes's briefing confirms that the humanitarian situation in Somalia has deteriorated because of the recent fighting in Mogadishu, which has resulted in the rapid outflow of more than 400,000 inhabitants, including the most vulnerable: children, women and the elderly. We are saddened by the fact that many of these persons continue to live in deplorable conditions, exposed to the elements and without medical help.

My delegation is also very much concerned about reports that the start of the rainy season has increased the outbreak of disease among internally displaced persons (IDPs) in southern and central Somalia. Humanitarian access to these persons and their protection pose significant challenges because of the insecure environment. There is no doubt that, until the security situation improves, the pace of humanitarian activities will continue to be constricted.

We note, however, the good work being done by the humanitarian agencies. Indeed, the Emergency Relief Coordinator mentioned that 290,000 persons have so far been reached with non-food items, while the health and sanitation response has involved support for hospitals, the provision of medicines and chlorination activities. The World Food Programme and CARE have also distributed food supplies to approximately 180,000 people. But much more remains to be done. We call upon the international community to do more and to assist these poor and distressed people through the humanitarian agencies. We welcome the desire expressed by the Transitional Federal Government to cooperate further with international organizations on humanitarian priorities and the coordination of activities.

With regard to northern Uganda, we note that there is progress in the Juba process, as evidenced by

the recent signing of the agreement in which the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army committed themselves to finding lasting solutions to the conflict between them. The two parties also decided on an extension of the cessation of hostilities agreement. We are encouraged by those positive developments. We hope that both parties will remain committed to non-violence and will promote further confidence-building measures with the objective of bringing an end to the displacement and deprivation suffered by the people of northern Uganda.

We have noted that the Government of Uganda cooperated effectively with the Emergency Relief Coordinator during his visit. That gesture is reassuring and provides the basis for enhanced partnership and cooperation between the United Nations and the Government of Uganda on the situation in northern Uganda.

There are positive developments in northern Uganda. The transition from military to civilian security has started, and the Government of Uganda has deployed police personnel as part of the implementation of the emergency humanitarian action plan. We hope that this process will continue and that full civilian security, with an adequate command presence, will be established throughout the camps.

While there is improvement in the general security situation and while some IDPs have begun to return to their homes, there are still many problems that have to be resolved in such areas as Kitgum district, which is home to more than 260,000 IDPs. The continued insecurity in Karamoja threatens the safety and well-being of civilians living in the district and in other nearby communities. Any approach aimed at alleviating the harsh conditions in this area must take into account the lack of development and the inadequate protection of civilians. Consequently, the district must be better resourced, and an effective protection strategy must be developed.

My delegation wishes to underscore the importance of meeting the humanitarian needs of IDPs during the return process. Therefore, we urge the Government of Uganda to ensure that basic social amenities are provided in settlement areas so that the returnees can benefit from early recovery and can be adequately reintegrated.

The Emergency Relief Coordinator's proposal of a triple effort by the humanitarian community to ensure

continued emergency relief and protection for northern Uganda should be commended. We appeal to donors to continue to support humanitarian activities in northern Uganda.

Mr. Kumalo (South Africa): I too wish to thank Mr. Holmes for his very detailed briefing to us today. He has brought an element of courage and urgency to the situation in the Great Lakes region, and that is greatly appreciated. His efforts are indicative of the courage and commitment of hundreds of non-governmental organizations and many of our colleagues, who are working on the ground under the most difficult of circumstances.

I was moved and very pleased by Mr. Holmes's statement, particularly when he pointed out that his mere presence in Somalia gave hope to many of the people he came across, who had already given up on the United Nations or even thought that the United Nations had forgotten them. I believe that, under those very difficult circumstances, his presence alone did much to provide credibility and, more important, give hope to those who are living under the most difficult circumstances.

It is for that reason that my delegation would like to pay tribute to the Ugandan soldiers in the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) who have given their lives trying to bring about a better life for the people of Somalia. Such setbacks and tragedies should encourage us to continue to seek a way out of this very difficult situation.

Like Mr. Holmes, my delegation believes that, as difficult as the situation may be in Somalia, the solution lies in a very fully inclusive political process whereby all Somalis — those who live in Somaliland and those who are outside the border — can come together, discuss and try to find a way out of the tragedy that has befallen their country.

We pay tribute to the humanitarian workers on the ground, for whom Mr. Holmes assures us the access they so desperately need is becoming better. We would hope that the Transitional Federal Government will continue to make it possible for the humanitarian workers to do what they do best, and we also hope that the support that the international community can give to the Transitional Federal Government and to the non-governmental people on the ground will one day help the people of Somalia to overcome the difficulties that they have had. We thank Mr. Holmes for having had

the courage to really go to that place and see for himself.

On northern Uganda, we are very pleased and encouraged by the improvement of the situation there. However, I must say that Mr. Holmes once again brought a dose of sobriety to the question of what needs to happen in that situation when he referred to the need for a seamless transition from relief to development. That has always been one of the most difficult things to achieve because sometimes the international community is moved by conditions that require relief, but development — which is far harder and requires more time and a longer commitment — becomes very difficult to undertake. Thus, when he says that the record of the international community in such transitions is not distinguished, he is absolutely right, because the international community tends to grow impatient to move on to the next crisis that we may have. And yet, without an assurance of some sustainable development, the areas tend to regress into even more conflict.

I am particularly pleased that, on the whole, Mr. Holmes' briefing on both northern Uganda and Somalia has now given the Council the basis of an experience that we can work with and build on as we seek ways to bring about change in those areas. When one remembers that, maybe a decade or so ago, northern Uganda was as desperate as Somalia is today, it gives us hope that, even though Somalia looks to be at its darkest moment at this time, that may be a sign, as we look at what is happening in northern Uganda, that in fact things may happen. I do not know whether it was by design that Mr. Holmes chose those two areas to visit, but in doing so he has given us a contrast highlighting what is likely to happen if the international community does not lose its commitment to staying with an issue under the most difficult circumstances.

Once again, we thank Mr. Holmes very much for his courage and pay tribute to all his colleagues on the ground, who are really the heroes of that work and represent a United Nations that is truly on the ground. We commit ourselves to assisting him in whatever way we can.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to Mr. Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for the

work he has been doing and for his substantive briefing today.

We share his concern about the serious humanitarian situation in Somalia. Events of recent months have increased the number of refugees and internally displaced persons. We call on the authorities in Somalia and all Somali parties to do their utmost to eliminate barriers to the provision of humanitarian assistance and to cooperate in the work of humanitarian organizations.

It is clear that the causes of the current humanitarian crisis in Somalia lie above all in the lack of a political settlement. Russia has consistently advocated the establishment of a Government and peace in Somalia in the interests of the people of that country and of security and stability in the Horn of Africa. We believe that the consequences of the crisis in Somalia can be overcome only through a broad-based dialogue. An important role in that process is to be played by the national reconciliation congress called for by President Yusuf.

We highly commend the efforts of the African Union, the League of Arab States, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and other interested parties to cooperate in the establishment of peace, stability and reconciliation in Somalia. We support the timely deployment there of an African Union peacekeeping force. We express our condolences to the Government of Uganda on the deaths of Ugandan peacekeepers in Somalia.

In the light of the ceasefire agreement between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army, it is our hope that the final phase in resolving the problem in northern Uganda has begun. We feel that the resolution of that conflict will also help to strengthen stability in the region of Africa where the borders of Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan meet.

Mr. Ikouebe (Congo) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks you, Sir, for organizing this important meeting. We also thank Mr. John Holmes for the information that he has brought to our attention and, first and foremost, for his great interest in the tragic humanitarian situations in the African regions that he has just visited. His recent fieldtrip was most encouraging to the people of the region, who have suffered so much.

As others have noted, the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region have endured a persistent humanitarian crisis, the causes of which are familiar to all. I would emphasize that chief among those causes are armed conflict, the lack of political settlements and, of course, natural disasters.

Some progress and reasons for hope have been noted, including an improvement in recent months in general food security in Ethiopia and Kenya, in particular thanks to better weather conditions. The overall picture, however, retains far too many causes of concern, and Mr. Holmes was, despite himself, a front-row witness to the untenable situation.

That is why we emphasize the imperative need for the Council and the international community to continue to support the efforts of the countries and organizations of the region. Those efforts should focus primarily on assistance for economic and social development in order to lay the foundations for genuine sustainable peace and development. First and foremost, we invite the leaders of these countries and all the parties to the various conflicts to shoulder their responsibility and take action, so that the international community — which can do no more than support their efforts — will be able to provide assistance over the long term. The accent must be on the responsibility of all the political actors, whose divisions and behaviour fuel these difficult situations.

Finally, we agree that throughout Africa, and in these two areas in particular, humanitarian crises could be eased through factors such as improved early warning systems, better access to basic health care, education and sanitation, increased numbers of small commercial farms in order to increase yield and promote farming that will be less subject to the vicissitudes of nature.

But the principal condition is the lasting settlement of armed conflicts, along with good governance and respect for human rights. All of this must be based on an improvement in the economic and social situation.

Mr. Mantovani (Italy): I wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Holmes for his comprehensive briefing on the humanitarian dimension of crisis situations in the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa, a dimension that, for Italy, is as crucial as the political and peacekeeping dimensions.

I should also like to commend Mr. Holmes for having visited Mogadishu. He is the first high-ranking United Nations official in many years who has been able to witness its dramatic reality. Finally, we appreciate his speaking out on violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, as well as his comprehensive approach to humanitarian work — which includes relief, but also protection of those most in need.

On Somalia, Italy cannot but share the deep concern at the deterioration in the humanitarian situation, and in particular at the suffering and displacement of hundreds of thousands of people as a result of recent fighting. We urge Somali authorities in particular to do their utmost to remove obstacles to the free movement of aid and humanitarian relief workers into and throughout the country, and we call on countries in the region to facilitate the cross-border provision of aid, as was stressed by Italy's Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ms. Patrizia Sentinelli, during her recent visit to the region.

Italy firmly believes that the only possible solution to the Somali conflict is through genuine political dialogue and reconciliation, as set out in the Transitional Federal Charter. We therefore fully agree with Under-Secretary-General Holmes's remarks on the need for an inclusive political process. The early convening of a national reconciliation congress involving all components of Somali society is paramount in that regard, and we appeal to the Transitional Federal Institutions to make this event as meaningful and inclusive as possible.

Italy joins others in strongly condemning the recent attacks against troops of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and expresses its condolences to the families of the Ugandan soldiers who died in them, as well as to the family of the Red Cross official fell victim to those attacks. We call on all parties to show continued restraint, and we support the present talks between the Transitional Federal Government, Ethiopian troops and clan elders from Mogadishu aiming at consolidating the cessation of hostilities. In that context, we believe that the role of AMISOM is crucial, and we have decided to support the African Union with a supplementary bilateral effort of \$13 million for that purpose.

We feel encouraged by the findings of Under-Secretary-General Holmes's visit, which hint at an

improvement of the humanitarian situation in northern Uganda as a result of the ceasefire agreement and the ongoing peace talks in Juba, which Italy fully supports. This positive evolution proves that a sound political process, led and managed by the region with the full support of the whole international community, can have an immediate impact on the affected population.

We support the approach under which it is time to start thinking about resettlement and reconstruction for northern Uganda. To that end, we appreciate the call on the donor community to remain engaged and invest in the sustainable development of a region which has suffered from marginalization. It would be interesting to know more about the cooperation of the Ugandan Government in that regard.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Humanitarian issues have long figured prominently on the Security Council agenda, and it is regrettable that several African countries remain sorely beset by humanitarian problems.

In some areas of Somalia, violence is on the increase, and piracy runs rampant. That situation poses a threat both to local livelihoods and to the safety of international navigation. In the Sudan, the continuing conflict in the Darfur region has had a serious impact on humanitarian relief and assistance efforts. In Chad and the Central African Republic, the refugee problem has become a threat to safety and stability. In Uganda, although the Government has resumed talks with the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the humanitarian situation in the north is improving, the country still faces the problem of a lack of funding.

In our view, a holistic approach is needed to address both the symptoms and the root causes of humanitarian problems. Such problems are normally a direct consequence of the exacerbation of a region's hot-spot issues, and crises are closely linked with political, security and development problems. To deal with humanitarian problems, it is necessary to undertake emergency relief measures that will yield immediate results. It is also necessary to adopt robust policy measures aimed at eliminating the root causes of crisis.

We believe that the following elements are needed in order to find a fundamental solution of Africa's humanitarian problems: vigorous advocacy and promotion of social harmony and unity; assistance for African economic development; poverty

eradication; and improvement in the livelihood of the general population.

Secondly, any improvement in the humanitarian situation in Africa depends on joint efforts by the countries concerned and the international community. In recent years, with the active support of the international community, African countries have worked tirelessly to resolve their own hot-spot issues and eradicate the root causes of humanitarian crisis.

We commend the Government of Uganda for resuming talks with the LRA, and we hope that progress in the political process will help further ease the humanitarian situation there. We support the international community's diplomatic efforts to find a political solution to the problems of the Darfur region. We call on the international community to provide assistance to Chad and the Central African Republic to help them deal with internally displaced persons. We believe that the international community should continue to pay attention to the humanitarian problem in Africa, bringing into play the advantages to each party involved, and should adopt a holistic approach to the problem so as to secure a gradual improvement in the situation.

Over the years China has participated actively in the international efforts to ease the humanitarian situation in Africa. We have worked through multilateral and bilateral channels for a proper solution to the hot-spot issues. We have participated actively in the peacekeeping operations in Africa and have provided assistance, within our ability, to help with the social and economic development of Africa. Looking forward, China, together with the international community, will play its part for the cause of peace, stability and development in Africa.

Mr. Suescum (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): First, we wish thank Mr. John Holmes for his visit to Somalia on 12 May and for his excellent report on the humanitarian situation in Uganda. Similarly, we wish to recognize the efforts led by Mr. François Loseny Fall in Somalia and Mr. Joaquim Chissano in the areas affected by the Lord's Resistance Army.

We note that the climate remains tense and volatile, although the humanitarian situation shows some signs of improving in both countries. We are glad to hear that the citizens of Mogadishu and in the north of Uganda are slowly returning to their homes, which is a hopeful first step. Unfortunately, their return is

encountering many obstacles, as Mr. Holmes as told us today. It is imperative that the international community provide more collaboration and financial assistance to supply, in both countries, a minimum level of humanitarian conditions and thus successfully stabilize the region. At the same time, it is equally imperative that Governments eliminate all obstacles to the effective development of humanitarian operations. Today's report by Mr. Holmes has provided some examples of those obstacles.

With regard to Somalia, many displaced persons refrained from returning to areas under military control in Mogadishu, as they have been scared off by the recent skirmishes. As a first step towards resolving this problem, the Government must recognize the magnitude and nature of the humanitarian crisis. It will also have to redouble its efforts to hold the inclusive national reconciliation congress.

In the absence of any lasting prospect for peace, the survivors want to avoid, at any cost, being caught in crossfire if hostilities resume. That is understandable, given that the tension could turn into unrest with little difficulty. Mr. Holmes' report shows that the outbreaks of violence continue. He gave us examples of incidents on 12 May, which unfortunately cut his trip to Somalia short. He also told us about the atrocious attack, only four days later, that cost the lives of four Ugandan soldiers in that country. This all demonstrates the violent reality. There are also reports of outrages against minority merchants in Mogadishu by the municipal authorities themselves. In the context of such daily violence, efforts for genuine reconciliation will be few and far between.

Given that sad reality, and as a bitter epilogue to the hostilities, there is the common denominator of serious violations of international humanitarian law.

The most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Somalia (S/2007/259) draws a devastating picture. In Uganda, the reluctant involvement of children in the conflict has even darker nuances. In addition to being direct victims, boys and girls are hostages in conflicts that systematically recruit them as actors. While these practices persist, the commitment of the authorities and the other parties involved, and those responsible for holding them, will remain in doubt.

We wish to avail ourselves of this opportunity to reiterate the part played by women in conflict

resolution. We call on the parties to increase the representation of women in the negotiation process in Juba.

It is essential to combat impunity in all these contexts. Respect for international human rights standards should not be negotiable. As Mrs. Louise Arbour, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, has pointed out, any agreement reached between the Lord's Resistance Army and the Republic of Uganda must be consistent with international law and must rule out any amnesty for war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and serious human rights violations. In 2005 our heads of State were emphatic in that respect. The United Nations also has the responsibility to use diplomatic, humanitarian and other appropriate peaceful means to help protect populations from those crimes.

Finally, regarding Somalia, we reiterate our request for the prompt and complete deployment of African Union (AU) troops so that the Ethiopian troops can withdraw from Somalia territory and so that the AU troops can support Ugandan troops in the reduction of hostilities. In Somalia as well as in Uganda, we have seen the need for a thoroughgoing exchange among the parties involved, for it is only through dialogue that a lasting solution can be found in these sad conditions. We again urge a political solution to that crisis through the successful installation of the national reconciliation congress in Somalia. As for Uganda, we urge that the opportunity involved in this new round of negotiations not be wasted.

Mr. Voto-Bernales (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to thank Mr. John Holmes, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for his report on his recent trip to Somalia and Uganda. His frank and clear presentation reflects the tragedy and insecurity suffered by millions who are victims of the humanitarian crises in Africa and elsewhere. I wish to express the unwavering support of Peru for the selfless work and strong efforts of his office to care for civilians, including internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees affected by this kind of crisis.

I wish to make a few comments on the report of Mr. Holmes.

In Somalia we condemn the attacks on African Union troops in Mogadishu, which caused the deaths of four soldiers and injured several persons, including

children. We are concerned by the deteriorating humanitarian situation and attacks on the civilian population, as well as by cases of intimidation and human rights violations perpetrated by the various parties. Those facts lead us to believe that the Government and political groups are squandering an opportunity to find a solution to the lengthy crisis in Somalia. Therefore we call upon the transitional federal institutions and all the parties to the conflict to commit to securing full access for humanitarian workers and to authorize the necessary transit permission in order for food aid to reach its recipients.

The international community and the Security Council must urgently examine how to address the humanitarian crisis in Somalia. Without security and without access to humanitarian assistance, all of the political efforts to stabilize the country may come undone. We agree that an inclusive dialogue and a genuine political process are the only means to bring about sustainable peace in Somalia.

We are grateful to Mr. Holmes for having visited Uganda and are pleased that the humanitarian situation has improved, although it must be noted that a great deal remains to be done and we must continue to encourage the parties in their efforts to put an end to the long-running conflict. For that reason we praise the parties for extending the ceasefire, and we hope the Juba peace talks will provide an opportunity to create a context in which to rebuild a democratic society.

We wish to join those who have urged the Ugandan Government and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) to reject impunity and to respect human rights and international law. We believe that national capacities in Uganda will have to be further strengthened in order to carry out the processes of pacification and reconciliation. In that context, financial and logistic support is crucial. Peru also believes that the international community should continue to support the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, which must be implemented. We must demand that the LRA free women, children and non-combatants who are still being held hostage.

Finally, I wish to express our gratitude for the work of President Joaquim Alvaro Chissano in his capacity as Special Envoy of the Secretary-General in relaunching the peace talks, as well as the Government of Southern Sudan for its mediation.

Mr. Belle (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I wish to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. John Holmes, for the realistic and detailed report on his mission to the two countries being considered.

First, I wish to make some comments on the situation in Somalia. Belgium is still very concerned about the insecurity and the humanitarian situation in Mogadishu and in other regions of the country. The displacement of hundreds of thousands of people and the abduction of humanitarian workers — who were later released — are sad and recent examples. The security situation and bureaucratic and other obstacles are hindering the delivery of assistance and the movement of humanitarian workers in Somalia. In that context, Belgium appeals to the Somali authorities to do everything they can to facilitate the access to humanitarian assistance.

While stressing the primary responsibility of the Transitional Federal Government, Belgium calls upon all parties immediately to ensure the protection of civilians, especially of children and women. It also recalls their obligation to respect international humanitarian law. Belgium commends the Government's authorization of a mission from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Louise Arbour, to investigate violations of human rights in Somalia.

In more general terms, it is essential that an inclusive dialogue and political process for reconciliation be established in order to consolidate the transitional federal institutions, to re-establish the authority of the State and to stabilize the country in a way that will endure.

The success of the national reconciliation congress announced by the Government is thus of vital importance. For the time being, it requires that the ceasefire be consolidated and that the situation in the region of Mogadishu be stabilized, which necessitates efforts by all parties to emerge from the cycle of violence.

Finally, in the meantime we must support the deployment of the African Union mission in Somalia (AMISOM) to contribute to stabilization in the country and to support the political process.

Allow me now to make a few comments on Uganda. The security and humanitarian situation in

northern Uganda has improved, and we can only welcome that fact. Many of the displaced persons have already returned home. However, there are almost 1 million people in camps, and thus a major challenge remains. It is important that the Government make every necessary effort to continue the improvement in the security situation in the north of the country.

The Government, in partnership with the international community, must provide what Mr. Holmes has described as a three-pronged humanitarian effort — assist people in the displaced persons camps, help those who are returning home, and help those who have already returned home. Those efforts will be achieved only if there is a complete resolution of the problem of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). It is thus clear that only a comprehensive peace agreement can truly convince all those who are displaced that it is possible to return home.

Therefore, the Security Council must continue to encourage the Juba talks. On that point, we must commend the agreement between the Government and the LRA on extending the ceasefire until the end of June and on the relaunching of the peace talks in Juba last 26 April. Thanks to the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Chissano, those discussions progressed and an agreement was reached on the protection of the LRA leadership.

Difficult discussions will now be launched on the agenda item concerning reconciliation and responsibility. I wish to close on that point. The principal leaders of the LRA would like the International Criminal Court to suspend the arrest warrants against them, and they are making that a precondition of a peace agreement. The Government, on the other hand, would prefer to have a peace agreement in hand before committing to anything with regard to the LRA or to the International Criminal Court.

On this point, the Security Council reiterated last March the fact that those who seriously violate human rights and international humanitarian law must be brought to justice. My delegation believes that the parties must continue their talks on this issue in order to reach a solution that respects this absolute requirement. If any form of justice other than the International Criminal Court were to be pursued, it would have to satisfy minimum conditions and respect

the principle of complementarity, in accordance with the Rome Statute.

In any case, for my delegation impunity is not an option.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United States of America.

We would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Holmes for his informative and timely briefing on the current humanitarian situation in Somalia and Uganda. His first-hand perspective provides the Council with valuable insight into these pressing crises.

The United States expresses grave concern over the recent violence in Mogadishu and the resulting loss of life in Somalia. But even before the recent outbreak of violence, hundreds of thousands of Somalis faced a chronic humanitarian crisis. Displacement and suffering caused by drought and floods in 2006 have now been dangerously exacerbated by additional conflict.

Despite ongoing challenges to aid operations in Somalia, we understand that international relief efforts are reaching more than 250,000 of those recently displaced from Mogadishu. We applaud the work of United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) delivering that life-saving assistance. We also salute the work of the United Nations country team for Somalia and the leadership of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for their courageous and dauntless work. The United States has provided significant resources to the current relief effort, and we remain committed to supporting humanitarian assistance in Somalia. We also continue to provide assistance for Somali refugees in Kenya and Ethiopia.

We are very concerned that the work of the United Nations and humanitarian NGOs in Somalia remains hampered by insecurity, roadblocks and inter-clan conflict, as we heard in Mr. Holmes's briefing. We reiterate our call on all parties to facilitate humanitarian access for the delivery of life-saving aid to those in need.

We commend recent commitments by the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG) to lift administrative impediments for international aid agencies, and we stress that recently announced visa and flight clearance requirements should not inhibit aid

efforts. We expect the TFG to facilitate the critical work of the United Nations and humanitarian NGOs for the welfare of the people of Somalia.

Let me join others in condemning the recent attack in Mogadishu on the forces of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). We express our sympathies to the families of the Uganda victims. We are gravely concerned about the recent pattern of attacks by extremist elements in Somalia, including the increased use of explosive devices. We call on all Somalis and regional stakeholders to prevent extremist elements that are intent on undermining the political process from conducting further attacks.

We have seen reports that the TFG will allow the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to investigate allegations of human rights abuses during the recent conflict. We welcome this news. Allegations of human rights abuses are very troubling, and we will follow the investigation closely.

Ultimately, the humanitarian situation in Somalia can only be addressed with the stability of a permanent ceasefire agreement and a viable, comprehensive reconciliation process. We therefore continue to urge all parties to re-engage in a sincere process of political dialogue as the best means of reaching a sustainable solution to the crisis in Somalia.

We also reiterate our support for the robust contingency planning proposed by the Secretary-General to prepare for the possible transition to a United Nations peacekeeping mission in Somalia.

On Uganda, we appreciate Under-Secretary-General Holmes's first-hand impressions of the humanitarian situation in northern Uganda, and we share his cautious optimism about the current negotiations. Improved security and progress towards a settlement have encouraged an estimated 350,000 people to return to their home areas. However, there remain more than a million displaced people in northern Uganda, and we stress the need for all returns to be safe and voluntary.

We commend recent efforts by United Nations Special Envoy Chissano to bring the parties back to the negotiating table in Juba. We support the efforts of the Government of Southern Sudan to facilitate the negotiations, and we are watching closely how the resumed process unfolds. We stand prepared to offer assistance with disarmament, demobilization and

reintegration should a final agreement be reached. In the interim, we continue to provide significant assistance to meet humanitarian needs in northern Uganda, including nearly \$85 million in 2006.

Finally, we note that meeting the continuing emergency needs of displaced populations and supporting longer-term recovery for returnees require strong leadership and coordination. We urge the United Nations, with OCHA's leadership, to ensure that humanitarian coordination needs in Uganda are addressed effectively.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I shall now give the floor to Mr. John Holmes to respond to comments and any questions that have been raised.

Mr. Holmes: Mr. President, may I take this opportunity to thank all the representatives around the table for their supportive and constructive comments. I hope their tributes to the comprehensive and detailed nature of my report were not simply indirect criticisms of its length.

I also think that it would not be too optimistic to say that there does seem to be virtual unanimity around the table about the analysis of the situation and what we need to do about it in the cases of both Somalia and Uganda. I find that very encouraging, in particular in the case of Somalia. That support was, I think, genuinely unanimous about the need for genuine political dialogue and reconciliation as the best way of tackling the humanitarian problems as well as the problems of the country as a whole. There was support for full deployment of the African Union Mission in Somalia. Also, there was agreement on the severity and size of the humanitarian crisis we now face, particularly with the size of the recent displacement from Mogadishu — which was, I think, the largest single displacement we have seen in the world so far this year.

I was also grateful for the support expressed for the humanitarian relief efforts that are under way, which so far have not made as much impact as we would have liked, but we are continuing to step up our efforts. Also, I note the welcome around the table for the proposed visit by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the view that this should take place as soon as possible.

The representative of France raised a question about what more we could do to improve access for humanitarian workers in Somalia. Of course, there is no simple, magic solution to this; it is something that needs to be tackled in a number of ways. I think that the most important starting point is the acceptance by every authority in Somalia — the Government and any others, local or otherwise, in control of territory or otherwise active — of respect for the principles of independence and impartiality of humanitarian action.

The Transitional Federal Government has established an inter-ministerial committee, headed by the Minister of Health, to liaise with the humanitarian community and to deal with humanitarian issues. We welcome the establishment of that body, and we will work as closely with it as possible on these issues.

As I suggested in my initial remarks, I think that it is important that the central Government give instructions, disseminating them and making them public, that all concerned should be helping and facilitating humanitarian work and access as much as possible. It is clearly important that humanitarian workers not be harassed at checkpoints or requested to pay so-called taxes. That is not the case at the moment; I am afraid that they are being harassed and requested to pay “taxes”. It is not always clear who is in charge of any particular checkpoint — they are simply armed groups. But insofar as the central Government has control over those who are manning checkpoints, it is important that it pass the message down to those concerned that that is not an acceptable practice and is not to be used as a method of checking free movement by humanitarian workers, who are simply trying to help those in most desperate need.

Again, I repeat that probably the single biggest thing that could be done to improve access for humanitarian workers is a move towards the kind of inclusive political dialogue and inclusive political settlement that we have all talked about around the table this afternoon. There may also be more specific things that could be done. For example, there are still some strategic airstrips which are not open for humanitarian access. For example, the airstrip at Merca, near Mogadishu, is not yet open. Reopening it for humanitarian flights in the near future would facilitate access to particular areas.

In general, I hope that the Council will keep a close eye on this issue and ensure that whatever

declarations or resolutions it may adopt in future contain strong appeals for respect for humanitarian principles by all those concerned and for maximum facilitation of humanitarian access.

The representative of Italy asked about cooperation with the Government of Uganda on the question of transition from immediate relief efforts to longer-term recovery and development efforts. The Government has established a joint monitoring committee aimed precisely at that process, chaired by the Prime Minister, and it is working with the international community on the spot to lead moves from the current emergency humanitarian action plan to the peace recovery and development plan, which I mentioned earlier and which is currently being worked up with the World Bank and others. So, there is good cooperation with the Government in that area. I think that, as I said, it is vital that the international community focus on this and on the question of the difficult move from immediate relief efforts with an emergency mindset — if I can put it like that — to longer-term development efforts, which normally involve different agencies with different, longer-term approaches. That is where the problem — the gap in relief efforts or in development aid — normally arises. As I said, I very much hope that in the case of Uganda we can make sure that that gap does not appear and that there is the seamless transition from relief to development that we all want to see.

I should also reiterate that, while the international community has a great responsibility in this regard and must do all that it can to make sure that the transition works properly, there is an enormous responsibility on the Government of Uganda as well to provide basic facilities in local areas in terms of health, education, police and court presence and provision of water to make sure that people can, once they have returned home, settle in rapidly and resume their normal lives in an acceptable fashion.

I would like to respond very briefly to one or two other points raised around the table. Some members, including the representative of Slovakia, mentioned, rightly, the question of children and armed conflict, both in the case of Somalia and in the case of Uganda. This is, indeed, a huge problem in Somalia, and all parties have, I think, been guilty in different ways and at different times of recruiting and using children — as internationally defined — as soldiers. It is vital that that process come to an end. In the case of Uganda, as

various representatives pointed out, children, women and others are still being held hostage by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). I appeal to it again to release them now. But at the very least, it is vital that in any peace settlement that there may be between the LRA and the Government of Uganda, full provision be made for the free and voluntary return of those who are still held by the LRA against their will.

The representative of Indonesia raised the question of the need for humanitarian relief efforts to take full account of local national sovereignty and the encouragement of local national capacity to respond to crises and disasters, and the need to make sure that international relief efforts do not, through their emergency aspects, damage longer-term development efforts. Let me simply assure him that we are extremely conscious of all of those points and very anxious to make sure that we work even harder than we have in the past to increase national capacity and reliance on local response as the first answer, because that is, indeed, a direction that we should be taking in the future.

Others mentioned — as I did in my statement — the question of piracy off the coast of Somalia and the need for the international community to take a stand on this and make an effort to stop it. Clearly, it is a major impediment to, for example, the efforts of the World Food Programme to provide the necessary food aid to the people of Somalia, because the quickest and most reliable method of moving large amounts of food is by sea. I hope that the Council and the international community will address themselves to deciding what can be done to address the problem rapidly.

On the question of the Juba peace talks, various representatives talked about the need to make sure that, whatever the outcome of the talks may be, they do not encourage impunity or amnesty and that full account be taken of the need for justice in the conclusion of the talks. I think that those points are well taken; there are being addressed in the context of the talks. That is why it is so important to find the necessary balance between the requirements of the lasting peace which the people of the area are desperately hoping for and the need for proper justice and accountability at the same time.

Finally I would like to thank those around the table who have paid tribute to humanitarian workers on the ground for their work in difficult and dangerous circumstances. That is much appreciated, and I will

ensure that those comments are passed on to those concerned. Those tributes are fully deserved, particularly in places like Somalia and northern Uganda.

The President: I thank Mr. Holmes for those helpful clarifications.

There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.